

VZCZCXRO9396
OO RUEHCI
DE RUEHIL #6116/01 1011256
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 111256Z APR 06
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4827
INFO RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ALMATY 9378
RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 0322
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 3570
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0665
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1414
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 5006
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 6232
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 8108
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT 0994
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0743
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 3081
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 0547
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 8372
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 3455
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 6185

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 006116

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/06/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: A/S BOUCHER MEETS SENATE CHAIRMAN AND NATIONAL
ASSEMBLY SPEAKER

ISLAMABAD 00006116 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Derived from DSCG 05-01, b.

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary: In separate meetings with visiting Assistant Secretary Richard Boucher, Senate Chairman Mohammedmian

SIPDIS

Soomro and National Assembly Speaker Chaudhry Amir Hussain confirmed their support for the USAID legislative strengthening project. Both leaders promised to secure a site for the proposed Institute for Legislative Studies and to support televising proceedings of their Chambers. They cautioned, however, that other officials were involved and could delay both projects. When Boucher questioned them on democratic elections, both parliamentary leaders promised free and fair elections in 2007, but were divided as to the prevalence of past election irregularities, with the Speaker giving all previous elections a clean bill of health. Both leaders expressed strong support for an independent, activist Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), noting that this was already promised in legislation. Soomro noted that democratization would also require democracy within political parties and urged A/S Boucher to focus on this important area. The leaders were open to the concept of a broad coalition of moderate forces in advance of the 2007 elections. End Summary.

Legislative Strengthening Program

[¶2.](#) (C) A/S Boucher opened his meetings with Chairman Soomro and Speaker Hussain by noting the important role that strong legislative institutions must play in a democratic set-up and promised continued support to strengthen parliamentary institutions. Both leaders responded with thanks for the work that USAID was already doing in this regard. The Speaker praised the USAID decision to work directly with parliamentary institutions in the current program rather than through NGOs as in the past.

[¶3.](#) (C) A/S Boucher raised our interest in continuing such support through construction of a Pakistan Institute for Legislative Studies (PILS), but cautioned that USG support

was contingent on the parliamentary leadership's identification of an appropriate parcel of land and agreement to continue budgetary support. Both leaders promised ongoing support to the PILS and agreed to work to obtain the necessary parcel of land. Nothing currently in their possession, however, was considered adequate. Soomro explained that the process was delayed by the resignation of the Minister of State for Interior who had been handling the issue. While the leadership wanted to obtain land quickly, several government agencies were involved, including the obstructionist Capital Development Authority (CDA). The Speaker promised to raise the issue with the Prime Minister and have him press for a swift allocation within one or two months. In the interim, both leaders requested that training for parliamentarians continue using either the Parliamentary Lodges or the old National Assembly building.

¶4. (C) A/S Boucher raised the important role that televising legislative proceedings could play in raising public awareness of legislatures' performance. Soomro immediately agreed pronouncing himself "very keen" on the idea. Televised proceedings would provide the public direct access to legislative information, increase accountability, and help voters judge legislator's performance. Hussain also expressed strong support for televised proceedings and promised that the process was moving forward. Both cautioned, however, that numerous government agencies were involved in the decision to proceed, making it a complex and lengthy debate. Soomro cited the Minister of Information as particularly problematic.

Elections

¶5. (C) A/S Boucher reiterated to both leaders the USG position that free and fair elections must be held in 2007. He pointed out that previous elections did not adequately meet these criteria and that a strong, independent ECP was

ISLAMABAD 00006116 002.2 OF 002

vital to the process. While both leaders promised that the 2007 contest would be free and fair, the Speaker denied that any fraud had occurred in previous elections. He argued that those who lost alleged rigging to cover their own deficiencies and that the allegations were baseless. The ECP was already fully empowered and ensured that no improper activity took place.

¶6. (C) Soomro had a more realistic view, admitting that violations had occurred in the past and that the ECP would need to be vigilant to prevent them in 2007. He believed that the ECP powers were sufficiently extensive but argued that a more conducive environment was needed. In this regard, he argued that it was necessary to change Pakistan's political culture. Victory in elections was, at present, directly linked to a party's ability to obtain resources and disburse patronage. As no transparent hiring process existed, civil servants who administered elections were often indebted to a party for their job and would tilt contests in their favor. Until patronage and money were delinked from election victory, parties would continue to do all they could to violate the rules.

¶7. (C) Soomro further argued that a lack of internal democracy within political parties contributed to systemic weaknesses. Parties tended to select candidates and leaders through appointment rather than democratic elections, leading to ongoing internal divisions and personal animosities. Soomro argued that all parties should be required to introduce genuine democracy and suggested that perhaps oversight of internal party contests by the ECP may be necessary.

¶8. (C) A/S Boucher asked the parliamentary leaders about the possibility of new political party coalitions developing in advance of the 2007 elections. Both leaders were of the view that shifting alliances were a regular part of Pakistani

politics. Hussain stated that the governing party was prepared to work with any like-minded group, but that cooperation would depend on the conduct of the opposition parties. In the current, polarized environment, he did not believe that differences could be easily overcome.

Anti-Money Laundering Law

¶9. (C) A/S Boucher pressed Speaker Hussain to seek the release of the GOP's Anti-Money Laundering Law from the Finance Committee. The Speaker made no comment and rapidly switched the subject to thank the USG for its assistance in earthquake relief.

¶10. (U) Assistant Secretary Boucher has cleared this message.
CROCKER